

# Facts on Women and Tobacco

Currently about 22 million (22 percent) of women 18 years and older(1) and at least 1.5 million adolescent girls(2) in the United States smoke cigarettes. The gap in smoking prevalence between men and women has narrowed dramatically in recent years. Although male smoking prevalence dropped 24 percentage points between 1965 and 1993, the prevalence of female smoking dropped only 11 percentage points during the same period.(3)

## Smoking Prevalence

- Daily smoking rates among female high school seniors have increased from 17.9 percent in 1991 to 23.6 percent in 1997.(4)
- Smoking rates among U.S. women 18 years and older vary considerably by racial/ethnic groups: American Indian/Alaskan Native, 35 percent; white, 24 percent; black, 24 percent; Hispanic, 15 percent; and Asian/Pacific Islander, 4 percent.(1)
- Women are beginning to smoke at younger ages, increasing their risks of developing smoking-related diseases.(2)
- The more formal education a woman receives, the less likely she is to be a smoker. In 1995, 40 percent of women between the ages of 25 and 44 who did not finish high school were smokers; 34 percent of high school graduates were smokers; 24 percent of those with some college were smokers; and only 14 percent of those who graduated from college were smokers.(5)

## Special Health Risks

- Between 1960 and 1990, the death rate from lung cancer among women increased by more than 400%, and the rate is continuing to increase. In 1987, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the number one cause of cancer deaths among women.(6) The American Cancer Society estimated that in 1998, lung cancer killed 67,000 women, and breast cancer killed 43,500 women.(7)
- More than 152,000 women died from smoking-related diseases in 1994.(8)
- Smoking has a damaging effect on women's reproductive health and is associated with reduced fertility and early menopause.(9)
- Women who smoke during pregnancy subject themselves and their developing fetus and newborn to special risks, including pregnancy complications, premature birth, low-birthweight infants, stillbirth, and infant mortality.(9)
- Between 8,000 and 26,000 children are diagnosed with asthma every year in the United States. The odds of developing asthma are twice as high among children whose mothers smoke at least 10 cigarettes a day. Between 400,000 and 1 million asthmatic children have their condition worsened by exposure to secondhand smoke.(10)
- Research suggests intrauterine exposure and passive exposure to secondhand smoke after pregnancy are associated with an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in infants.(11)
- For every dollar invested in smoking cessation for pregnant women, about \$6 is saved in neonatal intensive care costs and long-term care associated with low-birthweight deliveries.(12)

## Smoking Cessation

The health benefits of quitting smoking far outweigh any risks from weight gain caused by quitting smoking. Research shows that the average weight gain after quitting smoking is only five pounds and that it can be controlled through diet and exercise.(9)

## References

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**For more information regarding women and tobacco, contact your local chapters of the American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and the American Cancer Society.**

**Office on Smoking and Health**

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